

Midland School's Environmental Action Plan by Lise Goddard, May 2009 **Addressing Precept #4 of the school's Philosophy:**

“In this age of increasing concern about our environment, Midland students learn, through academic education and everyday example, to be good stewards of the Earth.”

Midland's Mission and Philosophy position us as a school firmly and uniquely in the territory of a meaningful 21st century environmental ethic on two fronts – one, a conservation ethic based on awareness and appreciation of nature with a corresponding desire to preserve what we have, and two, on the eve of global events that will affect the future of civilization (global climate change and global peak oil production), Midland is a model for a self-reliant, sustainable, uncluttered life, which prepares our students to become informed, responsible, pro-active citizens. This Environmental Action Plan is our attempt to acknowledge Midland's unique environmental position, and to intentionally guide us with specific, mission-driven steps to actualize the potential of our position.

On the first front, Midland uses its incredible land resource, 2,860 acres, as well as the adjacent Los Padres National Forest areas for study and recreation (re-creation) to teach and to inspire our students. We are fortunate at Midland to have clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, and extensive intact oak, chaparral, riparian and grassland ecosystems to explore. We are guided by the words of Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum, “In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught.”

Our curriculum prepares students to measure, to analyze, to develop arguments, and to take pro-active steps in issues that are important to them. In science classes, we work to understand our local natural resources. In English and history classes, we explore cultural diversity and read from the conservation literature. In art classes we draw material and inspiration from our surroundings. In our daily living ethic, both academic and recreational, we intentionally work at and celebrate our jobs as stewards of the Earth in the garden, native valley oak restoration, our daily Jobs system and work periods, and camping trips.

On the second front, at a critical tipping point in human history, it is clear that meaningful environmental stewardship requires living sustainably. At Midland, we embrace the definition of sustainability as “[meeting] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations from meeting their own needs.”¹ The first part of this definition, “meeting the needs of the present” requires the ability to define “needs” and to distinguish needs from wants. Making this distinction is rarely a societal value held in esteem and reinforced, yet it is the starting point of living within a small ecological footprint. Midland's founding had this critical dialogue at its core, “a community which distinguishes between ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ – and ‘in general’ tries ‘to get on without the latter’...” with “continual reevaluation of its changing contingencies.”² The second part of the definition, “without compromising the ability of future generations from meeting their own needs,” is also at Midland's core. In our facility and daily activities, we model lifestyles that neither overexploit resources nor leave harmful messes behind, and we authentically involve students in these activities.

Midland's 20 action steps outline an intentional and responsible 21st century lifestyle.

¹ 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, which defined sustainable development

² Lewis, Gary A. 2001. *Dominion Over Palm and Pine, Paul Squibb and his Students*. Artful Codger Press, p. 10.